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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is the variation within the narrative type of text. Specific attention is on the variation between two rather extreme forms of narrative: simple stories written for children that may be described as stereotypical in structure, and an artistic story. "The Steppe." by A. Cexov. The view is taken that stories are comparable with each other even when they originate in different cultural settings. Narrative might well be characterized as a "primary" or "basic" type of text with more reliance on iconicity and, hence, less variation from one culture to another than, for instance, exposition or argumentation. The purpose of investigating different stories is to understand the different text strategies that may be assumed to lie behind the final products and that are reflected in the text. The temporal, locative, and agentive text strategies all bring cohesion and coherence into a text. The investigation indicates that even the concrete linguistic signals of the temporal and participant-oriented strategies manifest the degree of prototypicality of a narrative text. (Contains 41 references.) (JL)

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VARIATION IN NARRATIVE STRUCTURE:

A SIMPLE TEXT VS. AN INNOVATIVE WORK OF ART

Martina Björklund and Tuija Virtanen

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1. Introduction

The focus of the present paper is on variation within the narrative type of text. We shall, in particular, discuss variation between two rather extreme forms of narrative: simple stories written for children that may be described as rather stereotypical in structure, and an artistic story, *The Steppe* by A. Čexov. We take the view that stories are comparable with each other even when they originate in different cultural settings. Narrative might well be characterized as a 'primary' or 'basic' type of text, with more reliance on iconicity and hence, less variation from one culture to another than, for instance, exposition or argumentation.

The variation in narrative structure under investigation here might be

viewed in terms of a scale of 'prototypicality'. At one end of the scale, one may find texts that conform to a standard narrative design, and at the other, texts with innovative strategies. The standard narrative design, a story, is widely discussed in the literature.¹ A story usually consists of a spatio-temporal setting in which the participants appear, and a temporal-causal sequence of actions and events that the participants are involved in. The final situation of a story typically differs from the one at the beginning of the text: the development that takes place in a narrative normally has an outcome of some kind. The main thread of the narrative is formed by the chain of actions and events, which is generally presented as the foregrounded part of the text (for grounding, see e.g., Chvany 1985, 1986; Hopper and Thompson 1980; Wärvik 1987). In a prototypical narrative textual units are discrete, and junctures between them tend to be explicitly signalled. Furthermore, the hierarchy of textual units often seems to be coded in such a way that fewer linguistic markers appear at lower-level boundaries and clusters of markers at the more macro-level boundaries (Givón 1984: 245). Finally, the peak of a story typically differs in structure from the rest of the text (see e.g., Longacre 1983). A narrative that contains innovative strategies and thus deviates from the expected narrative design may, all the same, be hypothesized to rely on our intuitions about a prototypical narrative structure: text-receivers probably

interpret 'unusual' texts against the background of a prototype.

The purpose of our investigation of different stories is to understand the different text strategies that may be assumed to lie behind the final products and that are reflected in the text (cf. Enkvist 1987a, 1987b). The temporal, locative, and agentive text strategies all bring cohesion and coherence into a text. Text strategies can combine and co-occur. Text-strategic continuity is typically formed through chains of temporal or spatial expressions, which are often adverbials (e.g., *one evening -> the next morning -> that night -> first -> then -> one day -> just then; or at the gate -> beyond the bridge -> on the way up the hillside -> on top of the hill*), or references to a particular character or group of characters (e.g., *Goldilocks - she - she - she - Goldilocks - she; or a man and a woman - they - they - the man and the woman - he - she - they*).²

The chains of text-strategically important elements thus bind the text together. At the same time they also serve text segmentation. Hence, a new stage in the story, a new location, or a reference to a particular participant may be signalled in such a way that it marks a new move or a new section in the text, a textual shift. As pointed out above, such textual boundaries occur on different hierarchic levels.³ Let us now examine these two sides of the same coin, the signalling of continuity and segmentation, in stories that differ

in the degree of conformity to the standard use of these devices.

We shall limit the discussion of text-strategic continuity and text segmentation to markers of temporal text strategy and devices of participant reference. Such a focus will bring us, first of all, to the occurrence and placement of temporal adverbials and other expressions of time. Secondly, we shall examine the alternation between full NP's, pronouns, and zero anaphora in participant reference.

2. Prototypical narrative strategies

Initial placement of temporal adverbials at crucial points of the text often functions as a necessary clue to the text-producer's text strategy. When these elements appear initially in the clause, sentence, or paragraph, they usually indicate a major or minor textual shift, as in (1).

- (1) *Once upon a time three bears lived in a house in the woods. (...)*
One morning while the bears were out walking, a little girl called
Goldilocks came to their house. First she looked through the window.
Then she peeped through the keyhole. 'Is anyone home?', she called.
There was no reply. Goldilocks opened the door and went in.
(...)
Just then the bears came home, very hungry after their walk.
(...) (BEARS)

Such adverbials are placed non-initially in the clause or sentence when no textual shift takes place, or when there is no need to indicate a textual boundary since another marker already performs this function. Similarly, other types of adverbials typically appear non-initially in the clause in texts that are steered by a temporal text strategy.

Signals of temporal text strategy differ in one important respect from signals of other strategies: the iconic temporal succession characteristic of the narrative - the 'then' relation between the different actions and events of a story - may be left implicit on the textual surface. Explicit temporal markers are, strictly speaking, only needed when they signal a deviation from an iconic temporal sequentiality (cf. e.g., *previously*; *meanwhile*) or temporal adjacency (e.g., *two weeks later*), or when they have important textual functions such as the marking of a textual shift (cf. e.g., the function of an explicit *then* in a temporally iconic text). If adverbial markers are used in a systematic way to signal a global temporal strategy in the text, they tend to disappear in the peak section, which then contains other markers. They often reappear in the post-peak section. The pre-peak episodes may be extremely explicitly marked. (For further discussion of the textual functions of adverbial placement, see Virtanen 1987, 1988.)

Another interesting aspect in the narrative is the manner in which partici-

pants are introduced in the story and referred to thereafter. Givón (1983) outlines a scale of phonological size - from zero anaphora to the full NP - in which lesser coding material is associated with the more continuous/accessible topics, and more coding material with the more discontinuous/inaccessible topics. Factors contributing to the choice of a full NP seem to include distance, other participants interfering in the actions that form the story-line, and risk for ambiguity. What most studies of referential choice also show is a tendency of a full NP to occur at a major textual juncture. (For discussion of participant continuity, see e.g., Clancy 1980; Givón 1983; Fox 1987.)

In (2) the use of the full NP *the cats* at the beginning of the fourth paragraph seems to be connected with the marking of a new textual unit, which is a backgrounded descriptive section that follows a foregrounded narrative passage.

(2) (...)

'Oh dear!' cried the man and the woman. 'There are so many cats in our garden, there isn't enough room for us!'

They shouted, 'Go away! Shoo! Go home!'

But the cats only sat and stared at the man and the woman. They could not go home, because they had no home. The little garden was the only place they had to call their own.

All day the cats played in the pretty garden. They chased the beetles and the butterflies, and climbed a tree, and played a game of tag along the top of the fence.

(...)

(CATS)

Here a pronoun would be unambiguous enough (cf. also *they* at the beginning of the second paragraph of the same extract). The lack of distance and the fact that the other set of participants have not been active in between would further justify the use of a pronoun at this point. Pronominal reference is, however, here blocked by the function that participant continuity plays in marking textual shifts. In line with the tendency of clusters of markers to appear at the major boundaries in a text, the boundary is, first of all, signalled with the help of an initially-placed temporal adverbial *all day*. The other instances of full NP's referring to participants in (2) may be accounted for in terms of avoidance of ambiguity with the other set of characters interfering in the storyline. Consider, from this perspective, also the end of the second paragraph in (1), where a full-NP reference to Goldilocks is used instead of a pronoun, to indicate a juncture between two lower-level textual units (no other markers are needed at this point as the shift is not a major one).

In sum, then, initial placement of temporal adverbials and the different resources for participant reference may be used as an efficient device for text structuring. A systematic and expected marking of text-strategic continuity thus contributes to the ease of text processing. At the same time, however, a story that conforms to a prototypical narrative design, of course, contains less information than a text full of surprises, which, in terms of information

theory, carries a lot of information. Let us now turn to a less prototypical narrative and investigate some of its innovative text strategies against the background of the discussion above.

3. Innovative narrative strategies

We have chosen *The Steppe* by A. Čexov, a major innovator in Russian and European prose. First a few words about the context of situation in which it was created.

The Steppe was Čexov's first serious long work and the first to be written for a prestigious journal. It was first published in the March issue, 1888, of the monthly journal *Severnyj Vestnik* (the Northern Herald). Čexov was then 28 years old. He was aware of the originality of the text, and predicted that he would be met with criticism (Čexov 1975: 186). Most critics in the journals of the time, in fact, agreed that Čexov had not succeeded in his first attempt at a long work (cf. Čexov 1977: 637).

Compared to the 'eventful' prose fiction that had been written prior to Čexov, his stories seem eventless. Čexov himself says about *The Steppe* that its plot is insignificant (Čexov 1975: 185). It is simply the story of a journey

by a nine-year-old boy Egoruška from his native town of N. to another bigger town, where he is to go to school.

The 'eventlessness' of Čexov's stories is one of the innovative devices that has been widely discussed in the literature. As Pomorska (1976) shows, Čexov structures the axis of combination so that the combinatory units are camouflaged. Perceivable, discrete units are replaced by 'non-events', or else, by units unmarked in the perception of the readers. The temporal sequence is separated from causality (cf. also Shukman 1977) and Čexov's stories often result not in a change but in a balance. What is achieved is the impression of a continuous stream. The average reader is left with a feeling that nothing really happens. This also relates to grounding. Čexov has been shown to play with our perceptions of the distinction between foregrounded and backgrounded material in his stories (Björklund 1984; Chvany 1985, 1986).

The way of representing the story-line as a flow of events in an uninterrupted stream with no sharp grounding distinctions is also characteristic of *The Steppe*. In accordance with the strategy of presenting what goes on in the text as a continuum, Čexov also manages to camouflage the temporal strategy in *The Steppe*. Mostly he does not mark temporal shifts with initial placement of temporal adverbials, of which we saw an example in a simple story in (1) above. Rather, he embeds the indications of temporal shifts in the central

participant Egoruška's perception of the world around him.

Let us take a look at some illuminating passages from *The Steppe*. The time span of *The Steppe* stretches from the morning of the first day to the morning of the sixth day, thus encompassing approximately 5 x 24 hours. Each of the six mornings is explicitly referred to in the text. As the indication of the mornings is representative of the way other times of day (mostly evenings and nights) are indicated, only the mornings will be discussed here. The six mornings are presented in the text as in Table 1.⁴

Day and chapter	Textualization
1st day chapter I	<p><i>Iz N., uездного goroda Z-oj gubernii, rannim ijul'skim utrom vyexala i s gromom pokatila po počtovomu traku bezressornaja, ošarpannaja brička, (p. 13)</i></p> <p><i>From N., district town of the province of Z., on an early July morning there drove out and rolled noisily off along the post road a shabby springless carriage,</i></p>
2nd day chapter IV	<p><i>Kogda on prosnulsja, uže voxxodilo solnce; (p. 48)</i></p> <p><i>When he woke up, the sun was already rising;</i></p>
3rd day chapter VI	<p><i>Kogda na drugoj den' prosnulsja Egoruška, bylo</i></p>

	<p><i>ranee utro; solnce ešče ne vsxodilo. (p. 79)</i></p> <p><i>When next day Egoruška woke up, it was early morning; the sun was not yet rising.</i></p>
<p><u>4th day</u> chapter VII</p>	<p><i>On vstal, odelsja i vyšel iz izby. Uže nastupilo utro. (p. 90)</i></p> <p><i>He stood up, dressed and went out of the hut. Morning had already come.</i></p>
<p><u>5th day</u> chapter VIII</p>	<p><i>Egoruška vspomnil, čto ešče mnogo vremeni ostalos' do ura, v toske pripal lbom k spinke divana i už ne staralsja odelat'sja ot tuman'nyx ugnetajuščix grez. No utro nastupilo gorazdo ran'se, čem on dumał.</i></p> <p><i>Emu kazalos', čto on nedolgo ležal, pripavši lbom k spinke divana, no kogda on otkryl glaza, iz oboix okon nomerka uže tjanulis' k polu kosye solnečne luči. (pp. 96-97)</i></p> <p><i>Egoruška remembered that there was much time left before morning, laid in anguish his forehead against the back of the sofa and no longer tried to get rid of the misty oppressive dreams. But morning came much earlier than he thought.</i></p> <p><i>It seemed to him that he had not been lying long with his forehead against the back of the sofa, but when he opened his eyes, from both windows of the little hotel room slanting sunbeams were stretching down to the floor.</i></p>
<p><u>6th day</u> chapter VIII</p>	<p><i>Na drugoj den' utrom prixodili proščat'sja Ivan Ivanyč i o. Xristofor. (p. 103)</i></p>

<p><i>Next day in the morning Ivan Ivaryč and Father Xristofor came to say goodbye.</i></p>

Table 1. *Explicit reference to the mornings in "The Steppe".*

As shown in Table 1, it is mostly through the perception of the central participant that we are informed about the temporal shifts that are caused by the break of a new day. Since most indications of time are made in a similar way - through representations of what Egoruška sees or hears - and since they occur at a considerable distance from each other, we as readers soon lose track of the temporal organization of the text. As in real life there is a constant flux of days and nights. After only one reading most readers cannot tell how many days are encompassed by the time span.⁵

However, the first morning, which forms the temporal setting of the initial action of the story, is referred to by a temporal adverbial not far from the absolute beginning of the first sentence of chapter I. Also, the last temporal shift of the text is marked by a temporal adverbial at the beginning of the first sentence of a paragraph. This shift occurs about one page from the end of the text. Thus, the first and the last indications of time are close to the absolute boundaries of the text and are, as we have seen, marked with temporal adverbials. The adverbials *on a morning* and *in the morning* (in Russian *utrom*

in both cases), so to speak, form a frame round the temporal shifts that occur within the text. The text-medial shifts, however, never coincide with a chapter boundary. Consider Figure 1.

chapters	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
days	1	2			3		4	5 6

Figure 1. Temporal organization of "The Steppe".

Another subtle means of creating a tight connection is the use of pronominal reference at major junctures in the text. As pointed out above, in such instances, full NP's tend to be used with reference to the participants. If, however, a pronoun is used, the new narrative unit is more tightly bound to the previous one. The text segmentation becomes less clear-cut and an impression of a uniform continuum is created. This may be illustrated by the following two passages from *The Steppe*. In reference to Egoruška we find a pronoun in combination with a camouflaged temporal strategy.

The first passage is from the list of mornings in Table 1. It is repeated in (3) with more context, to show the effect more clearly.

- (3) *Egoruška pokrepče vzjalsja rokoj za verevku, kotoruju byl perevjazan tjuk, ešče zasmjalsja ot udovol'stvija, popravil v karmane prjanik i*

stal zasypat' tak, kak on obyknovenno zasypal u sebja doma v posteli...

Kogda on prosnulsja, uže vosxodilo solnce; (...) Da i vsja mestnost' ne poxodila na včerašnjuju. (p. 48)

Egoruška took a tighter hold with his hand of the cord with which the bale was tied up, laughed once more with pleasure, rearranged the cake in his pocket and began to fall asleep as he used to fall asleep in his home in bed...

When he woke up, the sun was already rising; (...) And the whole landscape did not resemble yesterday's.

As we can see, the pronoun *he* occurs at a juncture that is both temporal and spatial. Almost a whole night has elapsed from the previous sentence, and while asleep, Egoruška has travelled so far that the landscape now looks quite different. In this passage, however, there are no intervening clauses and no other participants are mentioned between the pronoun and the previous mention of Egoruška. Moreover, there is a certain continuity in the action described, since *waking up* is naturally the ultimate outcome of *falling asleep*. Thus, the whole composition of this passage seems to aim at blurring a major textual boundary.

In example (4), pronominal reference *he* is used at a major textual juncture, although the previous mention of Egoruška occurs several clauses earlier. Three other male participants are mentioned in the intervening clauses.

- (4) *Oboz tronulsja s mesta rano, potomu-čto bylo ne žarko. Egoruška ležal na tjuke i drožal ot xoloda, xotja solnce skoro pokazalos' na*

nebe i vysušilo ego odeždu, tjuk i zemlju. Edva on zakryl glaza, kak opjar' uvidel Tita i mel'nicu. Čuvstvuja tošnotu i tjažest' vo vsem tele, on naprjagal sily, čtoby otognat' ot sebja eti obrazy, no edva oni isčezali, kak na Egorušku s revom brosalsja ozornik Dymov s krasnymi glazami i s podnjatymi kulakami ili že slyšalos', kak on toskoval: "Skučno mne!" Proezžal na kazač'em žerebčike Varlamov, proxodil so svoej ulybkoi i s drozvoj sčastlivyj Konstantin. I kak vse eti ljudi byli tjažely, nesnosny i nadoedlivy!

Raz - što bylo uže pered večerom - on podnjat golovu, čto-by poprosit' pit'. Oboz stojal na bol'shom mostu, tjanuvšemsja čerez širokiju reku. (chapter VII, pp. 91-92)

The convoy set off early, because it was not hot. Egoruška lay on the bale and shivered with cold, though the sun soon appeared in the sky and dried his clothes, the bale, and the earth. He had barely closed his eyes when he again caught sight of Tit and the windmill. Feeling a sickness and heaviness in his whole body, he used all his powers to drive away these images, but they had barely vanished when Dymov the mischief-maker with a roar was rushing at Egoruška with red eyes and raised fists, or else he could be heard fretting: "I'm bored!" Varlamov was riding past on the little Cossack stallion; happy Konstantin was walking by with his smile and the bustard. And how oppressive all these people were, how unbearable and disturbing!

Once - it was now just before evening - he raised his head to ask for something to drink. The convoy was standing on a large bridge stretching across a broad river.

As we can see, a whole day has passed between the two paragraphs in (4). In the morning (cf. *early*), the convoy leaves a village. Towards the evening it is standing on the bridge leading to the town that is the goal of the journey. However, this boundary is camouflaged through the indication of the time just in passing, like a parenthesis. This new stage of the journey is very tightly connected to the previous paragraph through pronominal reference to

Egoruškin, even at some risk of ambiguity. The textual boundary is blurred and this creates an impression of an unstructured continuum.

4. Discussion

One of Čexov's important text strategies in *The Steppe*, as in many of his other texts, is to blur or camouflage textual boundaries. This strategy acts together with the separation of the temporal sequence from causality, and with the unusual grounding strategies, to create the impression of a continuous stream. In this text, these strategies are also ultimately connected with the strategy of using internal points of view (cf. Uspensky 1973: 130ff.), or in Odincov's terminology, subjectivization of author's narration (Odincov 1980b: 185ff.; cf. also Hasan 1985: 68ff.).

When we read a narrative text, our expectations tend to coincide with the standard design. We therefore also interpret narratives against the background of this knowledge. If we then come across a text which deviates from the standard, interpretation is more difficult because we are forced to look at things in a new way. According to Molčanova (1988: 38), deviations from the norm demand extra interpretive effort and they are thus a source of implicit

information. As we have seen, the deviant text strategies adopted by Čexov in *The Steppe* create the impression of a continuum. Thus, events and actions flow in an uninterrupted stream just as in life. This comparison is actually what many literary interpretations of the text are based on. For instance, one of Čexov's contemporaries, the writer V.G. Korolenko, compared public life of the 1880's with 'this steppe' (cf. Korolenko 1986). Bitsilli (1983), again, sees 'this road' as life's path: "Chance and not 'selective affinity', brings men together and separates them" (Bitsilli 1983: 89). (Cf. also Björklund 1988.)

That we match texts against the background of our knowledge of prototypical text designs also seems to be corroborated by the reactions of many average readers and critics contemporary with Čexov. In his letters Čexov himself refers to his text as a *povest'*, which is one of the narrative prose genres in Russian literature (= an extended short story or a short novel). In fact, the subtitle of *The Steppe* is *The Story of a Journey*. Readers, however, tended to see only descriptions, presumably because of the camouflaged segmentation that produces the impression that nothing really happens. In their opinion, the text was dull and demanded a tremendous effort from the reader. It was seen as a collection of essays (*očerki*), or as an ethnographic work, rather than as a fictional, artistic text (cf. Čexov 1977: 636-643). But as Odincov (1980a) notes, the opinion that *The Steppe* is a *povest'*, and not an

očerk, has triumphed.

The initial uncertainty about the genre of *The Steppe* links up with Gal'perin's observation that what deviates from the norm (or prototypical design) of one text type may, in fact, be typical of the norm of another type of text (Gal'perin 1974: 26). Thus, on a higher level of abstraction, the scale of 'prototypicality' outlined at the beginning of the present paper might be represented as in Figure 2.

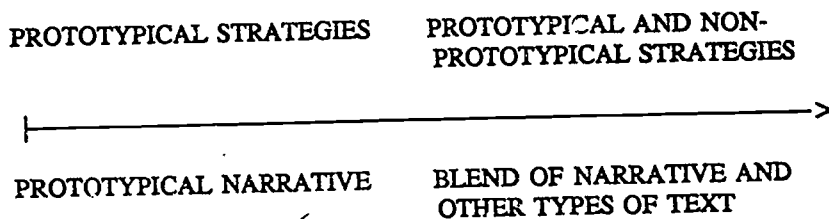


Figure 2. Scale of 'prototypicality' of narrative strategies.

The present investigation indicates that even the concrete linguistic signals of the temporal and participant-oriented strategies manifest the degree of prototypicality of a narrative text. Further empirical studies are needed to account for the kinds of 'deviating' strategies that may be included in the narrative type of text and their effect on text processing. Yet, we have, even at this stage, an explanation of the first readers' reactions to *The Steppe*. Too many of the strategies that lie behind the text are not typically narrative, but

rather, they remind the reader of other types of text, such as exposition or description. Innovation within one text type may thus reside in the use of strategies typical of another type of text.

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Footnotes

1. For narrative patterns, see e.g., Aristotle, *Poetics*; Propp (1928), and studies in narratology; Labov and Waletzky (1967); story-grammars, e.g., Rumelhart (1975), cf. also de Beaugrande (1982) for a critical survey; Hasan (1984), Butt and O'Toole (1985).
2. For discussion, see e.g., Enkvist (1987a, 1987b); Gal'perin (1981); Givón (1983, 1984); Grimes (1975); Longacre (1983); Virtanen (1988).
3. Space forbids a discussion of typographic text segmentation, e.g., paragraph and chapter boundaries, which need not coincide with the thematic text segmentation considered here.
4. The translation into English is M.B.'s, and it follows the Russian original as closely as possible. Page references are to Čexov (1977).
5. Even in a literary analysis of the temporal structure of *The Steppe*, it is possible to lose a day, cf. Finke (1985) who talks about a three-day journey (p. 110), although the town that is the goal of the journey is reached in the evening of the fourth day.

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